

# Mississippi Department of Human Services

## Press Release



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### **Federal Judge Dismisses Lawsuit Against Oakley Youth Development Center**

(JACKSON, Miss.) — The Mississippi Department of Human Services is pleased to announce that a federal lawsuit brought against the State of Mississippi involving the conditions of confinement at Oakley Youth Development Center has been dismissed by Federal Judge Henry T. Wingate. The MDHS, Division of Youth Services, has worked in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Justice to better the conditions for all youth adjudicated delinquent and assigned to Oakley through Mississippi youth courts.

“The Division of Youth Services has worked to improve conditions and education, while ensuring the safety and security of youth at Oakley,” said MDHS Executive Director Richard Berry. “We appreciate the Department of Justice and the federal court’s affirming the progress and advances made for youth in state custody.”

“I want to thank Richard Berry and the Mississippi Department of Human Services for working hard over the last nine years to bring conditions to their current levels at the Oakley Youth Development Center,” Gov. Bryant said. “The diligence of their staff to meet the many compliance issues is apparent, and they have succeeded in improving the center drastically from where it was from almost a decade ago.”

The lawsuit began in 2003 and led to a settlement agreement and consent decree in 2005 that contained 74 provisions. In 2010 the state had met 51 of those requirements, and an amended agreement was entered into by all parties. Earlier this year the federal monitor assigned to the case found that OYDC had maintained substantial compliance with the 23 remaining provisions for a significant period of time. As a result of that report, DOJ and the State of Mississippi filed to dismiss the suit.

Numerous changes have occurred at Oakley since 2005. Expansion of medical and dental services, better mental health care, and an updated education program accredited by Mississippi Department of Education are just a few of the programs now successfully operating at facility. Although DYS has had numerous challenges to overcome, the division has accomplished its goal of meeting the requirements of the lawsuit.

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